

# Alba Witkin, philanthropist and civic activist, dies at 95

By Berkeleyside  
Editors

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Alba Pichetto Kuchman Witkin, a civic activist and humanitarian who donated millions of dollars to educational and legal causes, died at her Berkeley home on Shasta Road on Dec. 26, surrounded by her children and two dogs. She was 95.

Alba, who had lived Berkeley since 1978, was the widow of the late Bernard E. Witkin, a legal scholar and the author of the 37-volume Witkin treatises on California law.

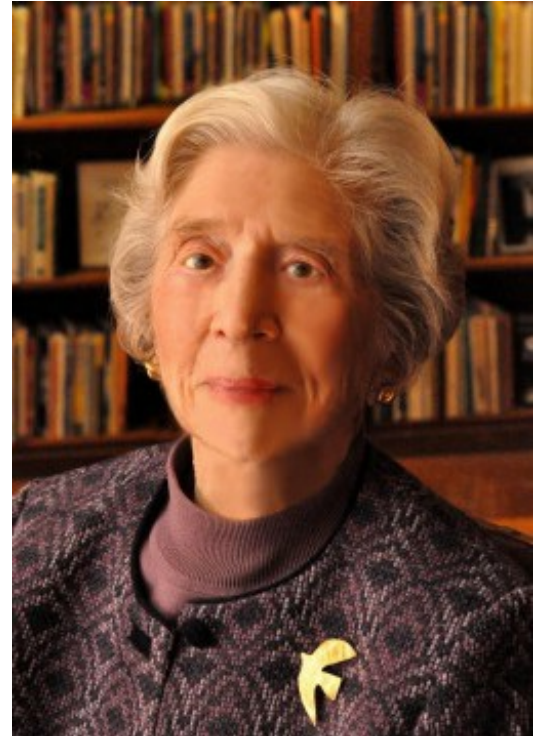
Alba was born in New Jersey in 1919 and moved with her family to California in 1929. She received her bachelor's degree in 1941 from Fresno State College, graduating with highest honors, and was valedictorian of her class. In 1942, during a time when so many women quickly settled into marriage and home life, Alba received a master's degree in Public Personnel Administration from Stanford University and accepted a position with the State Personnel Board in Sacramento.

First, however, after graduation she worked with the American Friends Service Committee (Quakers) regarding the relocation of Japanese American college students from the World War II West Coast internment camps to eastern and Midwestern colleges. This formative experience with Quakerism, conscientious objection, non-violence, and peace instilled a lifetime devotion to these ideals.

In 1946, Alba married Carl Kuchman, an attorney, and had three children: Richard, Lisa, and Kenneth. Carl died in 1967. Alba was twice elected to the Sacramento School Board and held elective and appointive offices with many community organizations, including the Governor's Conference on Juvenile Delinquency, the City/County Human Relations Commission, the Blue Ribbon Committee for the Revision of the County Charter, the Sacramento Civil Service Board (serving as its president), Sacramento League of Women Voters (serving as the League's Legislative Advocate in the early 1950s), the Sacramento YWCA, the Community Welfare Council, and the Sacramento Peace Center.

In 1964, Alba was appointed to the California Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The Commission was established in 1957 to investigate alleged deprivations of the right to vote on the basis of color, race, religion, or national origin; to study denials of equal protection under the U.S. Constitution; to appraise the laws and politics of the federal government with respect to equal protection; and to report findings and recommendations to the President and Congress.

Bernard E. Witkin's career in the law spanned almost 70 years, included an impressive range of activities, and took place as the law of California was experiencing exponential growth in both size and complexity. In his positions as Supreme Court clerk and Reporter of Decisions, in his activities as a tireless writer and lecturer, as a teacher to experienced judges and to aspiring members of the Bar, and as an advocate for legal reform, Witkin had enormous impact on California law, and on the laws of other states. The fact that the Witkin treatises have been cited by the California Supreme Court and Courts of Appeal more than 25,000 times is a lasting tribute to Witkin's genius and influence.



Together in 1982, Bernard and Alba established the Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation to dedicate resources and energies toward the improvement of social justice and society. After Bernard's death in 1995, Alba carried on their joint charitable work. In recent years, health, education, and enrichment needs of young children and foster children became special concerns.

In addition to her philanthropic work, Alba also served on the boards of the University of California Friends of the Botanical Garden, the University YWCA, and the National Peace Garden in Washington, D.C.

Since 2005, the California Judges Association annually awards the Alba Witkin Humanitarian Award to honor a judicial officer who is making a difference outside of the courtroom.

In March 2014, Alba was inducted into the Alameda County Women's Hall of Fame for her work in philanthropy.

### **The Witkin Charitable Foundation**

In 1982, Alba and Bernard established the Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Trust with funding from royalties of Bernie's extensive legal writings, publications, books, and treatises so that they could provide vital aid and assistance to non-profit groups. Their generosity kept music alive in the Berkeley public school system, helped provide affordable housing and food for the needy, supported gender and refugee studies, funded mental health services, and supported projects for peace, social justice, and human rights. In addition, Bernie and Alba additionally made gifts directly to charities from their individual funds.

In 2003, Alba reformed the Trust into the Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation. Currently, the Foundation makes grants to over 40 charitable organizations each year.

The Witkin Charitable Foundation and (before 2003) the Witkin Charitable Trust have been supporters of the Center for Youth Development Through Law at Boalt Law School since it was created in 1995. The Center enables inner-city young people to learn about the law, participate in democracy, gain employment experience, and achieve their goals in life.

In addition, Alba regularly made individual donations to more than 100 additional programs that provide support, education, and enrichment opportunities for young children and foster children.

She also supported several law-related activities that were important to late husband, including funding more than \$1 million for the editorial expenses for CJER's four-volume set of California Judge's Benchbooks on civil proceedings organization.

Alba also funded the creation of the several children's day care facilities at the University of California, Berkeley.

The Foundation also makes grants to:

- West Coast Children's Center
- Mills College, Early Childhood Education Department
- St. Vincent's Day Home
- Blue Skies 4 Children
- Court Appointed Special Advocats ("CASA")
- Beyond Emancipation
- East Bay Community Law Center
- STAND! For Families Free of Violence
- Legal Services for Children

- National Center for Youth Law

The family suggests that any contributions in Alba's memory be made to the Bernard E. & Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation, 2740 Shasta Road, Berkeley, California, 94708.

Alba requested that no memorial service be held for her, according to her son Kenneth Kuchman.

*Feel free to share your condolences for and memories of Alba Witkin in the Comments.*

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